

# Pathological gambling is associated with age

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Researchers of the Psychiatry and Mental Health research group at the Bellvitge Biomedical Research Institute (IDIBELL), in the Bellvitge University Hospital, have shown that patient age influences the onset of pathological gambling disorder and its clinical course. The study results were published in the *Journal of Gambling Studies*.

## Personality traits

The study was conducted with more than 2,300 patients aged from 17 to 86 years. The coordinator of the study, Susana Jiménez-Murcia, explains that some [personality traits](#) associated with age are risk factors in different stages of life.

Younger patients (from 17 to 35 years) are more likely to be impulsive and seek new sensations that act as precipitating factors of gambling. In contrast, for older patients (from 55 to 86 years) these risk factors decrease but others increase, like harm avoidance (tendency to anxiety and excessive worry) and cooperation. "Older people do not gamble to seek awards or for the challenge of winning or for [competitiveness](#) as young people do, but they gamble to modulate [negative emotional states](#)", explains Jiménez-Murcia. "Older patients try to flee from loneliness, [dissatisfaction](#) or even [physical discomfort](#)."

"The only personality factor that does not vary with age is self-direction, the ability to take control of our lives, to be persistent with a goal" says the researcher. The research confirms that this factor "is low at all stages and that could be one of the keys to the treatment and prevention of the

disorder."

## Early intervention

The study associates young patients with higher severity in their gambling conduct. "[Early intervention](#) in these patients allows us to understand the causes of the problem in the early stages and we can give to patients tools to control it." One of the conclusions of the study is that [pathological gambling](#) is a temporary and episodic condition in patient's life. "We observe," says Jimenez, "that at certain times of the life, some social, environmental and personal factors can ease to control this behaviour but in other moments it is not so easy, and the psychopathology could be more serious. But the good news is that it is not a chronic disorder for life".

In patients aged from 55 to 86 years, the disorder is associated with health problems, while middle age is associated with economic problems. The study also detected a later gambling onset in women, from 35-40 years, while men begin to gamble younger.

Researcher Susana Jiménez Murcia explains that in recent years the profile of the patients has changed as a result of the rise of online gambling: "now we see younger, college-educated and higher socioeconomic level patients. We must continue working to promote responsible gaming and also to inform of the potential risk of gambling."

**More information:** Granero R\*. , Penedo E.\*, Stinchfield R., Fernández-Aranda F.\*, Savvidou L.G., Fröberg F., Aymamí N\*. , Gómez-Peña M.\*, Pérez-Serrano M.\*, del PinoGutiérrez A .\*, Menchón J.M.\* and Jiménez-Murcia S\*. . Is pathological gambling moderated by age? *Journal of Gambling Studies*. [DOI 10.1007/s10899-013-9369-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-013-9369-6)

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